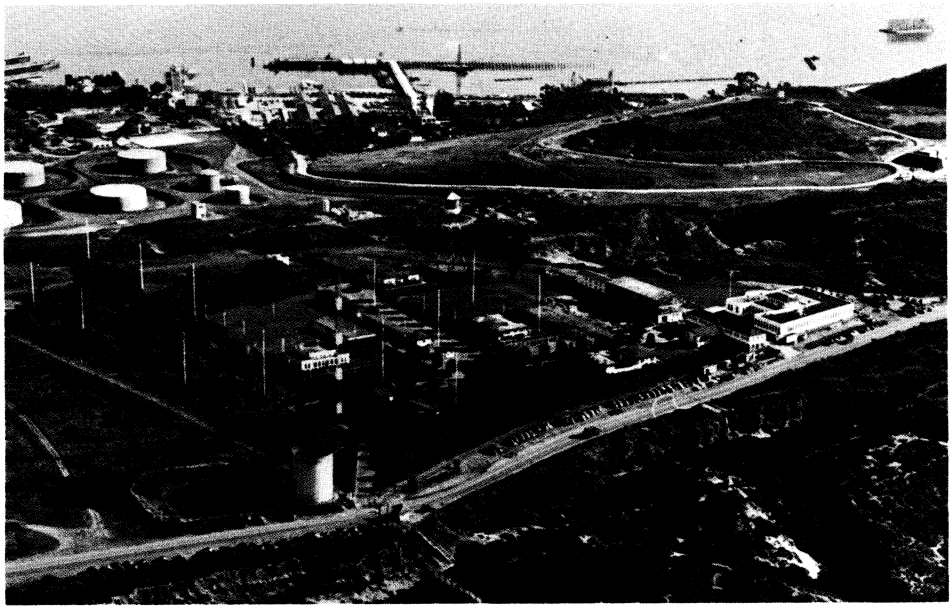
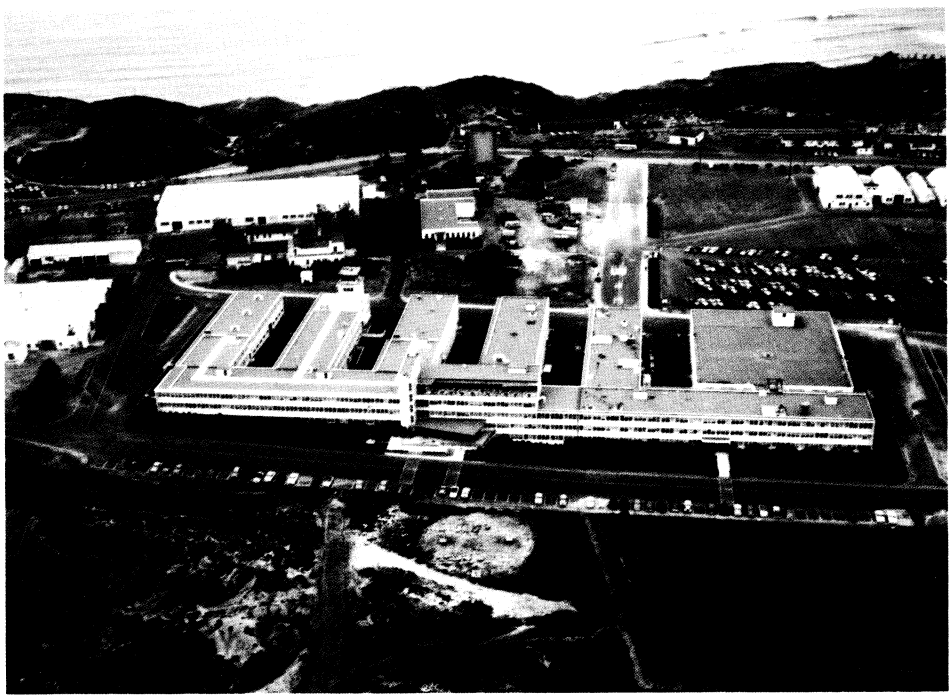


Navy Radio Station, Point Loma and Navy Radio and Sound Laboratory, 1942. View to southeast. Building 2 under construction at right center.



Navy Electronics Laboratory, 1954. View to west. Building 33 in center.

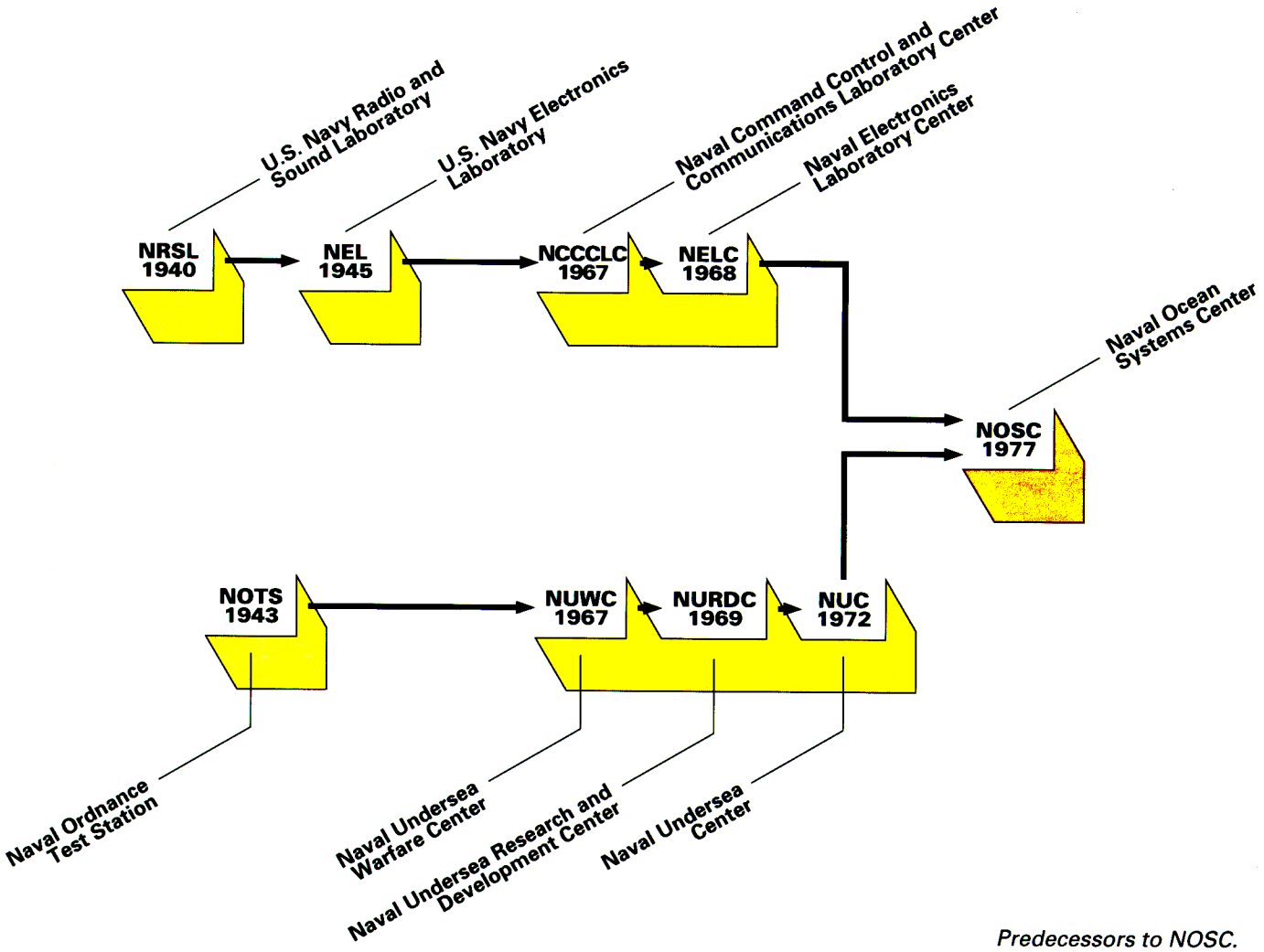
Overview

The Naval Ocean Systems Center (NOSC) in San Diego was formed in 1977 by the merger of two separate Navy laboratories: the Naval Electronics Laboratory Center (NELC) and the Naval Undersea Center (NUC). The history of NOSC, however, embraces the separate histories of these two predecessor organizations, and in turn, the histories of their predecessors. Part of NOSC traces its ancestry back to 1940 when the U.S. Navy Radio and Sound Laboratory (NRSL) was established at San Diego, and part traces its ancestry to 1943 with the establishment of the Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS) at Inyokern, CA, in the high desert country northwest of the Mojave Desert.

While NOSC has had various names over the years, a history of a working laboratory is more than a history of its name changes. This short history discusses the events, the policies, and the people that have influenced the laboratory and its products. It examines the effects, issues, and motivations that shaped NOSC's work as we know it today.

Specific projects undertaken at this Center have taken place against a background of technological progress. During the period covered by this history, computers, for example, progressed from costly room-sized mainframes to inexpensive microcomputers offering much greater computing power. During the 1950s, when few computers were available, NOSC scientists built their computers and developed programming languages. Three decades later, these scientists and engineers have far more computing power on their desks in "personal computers" than they once had in mainframes. In addition, they can now work with new-architecture supercomputers able to solve problems that were previously thought unsolvable.

This history highlights projects that exemplify many programs and the work of many people. Foremost among these projects have been those dealing with antisubmarine warfare, radio communication, navigation, command control, oceanography, and arctic submarine operations. Not all projects begun at NOSC have led to new operational systems such as those described here. Much of the work of Navy laboratories has consisted of "quick fixes," emergency modifications to systems and electronic devices to solve a particular problem, to extend an existing capability, or to make the system work in a new enviornment. Such work seldom is well-known, but it wins the gratitude of the Navy and its personnel, whose success and whose lives can depend on such results.



Predecessors to NOSC.